

NOVEMBER 24, 1983

Early winter temperatures are continuing to bless the Shortgrass Country. Weeds and tender grass are still growing from the late rains. Where dry unrest was ruining the scene, herders are now waxing away into a weather pattern that they don't understand, but do appreciate.

Before the rains fell, the strongest hearted hombres in our lot were so downcast that the stepping stones across a garden fish pond would have looked more formidable than the Great Wall of China. Friends of mine that officed in the downtown bank building in San Angelo claimed they were riding the service elevator to keep from listening to the jugkeepers sighing and talking to themselves.

Emotions were plenty strained in all quarters. Fossil fuel miners were having so much tough luck that Desk and Derrick Clubs were calling secret meetings to defer a surprise credit investigation. About everything to do with our economy was in a counter spin that looked like the last lap was overdue.

But once it started raining, stocker cows took an easy 50 bucks-a-head gain and old ewes nearly doubled in price. I saw ranch citizens who the week before were listing so bad and limping so hard that their belt lines and belt loops had collapsed. However, in a few days milky eyes cleared, coughs and wheezes subsided, and new life came back to their being.

The rains flat saved my life. Until it rained, the bags under my eyes were making such big pouches that the pressure on my skin was making my cheeks recede. Patches of grey hair were forming so fast that double-acting dye wasn't fast enough to even color a test plot. Worst of all, somewhere from August to September, I suddenly lost four ounces of body weight.

I say, "suddenly." Actually it was such a rapid loss that I might have misread the scales. As I think I told you once, my prime weight in the hot summer months runs nine pounds heavier with my clothes off than it does fully dressed wearing a pair of boots. I never have bothered to weigh my clothes but the boots I use at weigh-ins and for light ballroom dancing weigh five pounds. The point is that like those tires they run on the test tracks at Angelo, I expand as the heat goes upward and draw down once frost has chilled the climate.

After I'd trimmed off the four ounces, my clothes did fit better and I was able to pull on my boots faster. Funny thing, all those folks that had been hurting my feelings about my weight didn't notice when I slimmed down. I suppose it was because the loss was so equally distributed over my whole body.

Fretting over dry weather has put a lot of shrink on a lot of cowboys. I've seen several high strung hombres that had faded into frame and hide from going around wringing their hands on wadded-up feed bills and pacing 12 x 12 bedrooms trying to make it rain before time to get up to go feed another day.

Most of the big dry weather-weight-losses are recovered on six-egg breakfasts about the time the chickens stop laying, or nine-tortilla lunches that coincide with the Mexican cowboy's winter vacation. Four ounces is a serious amount to lose at my age, yet figured on a daily basis it's probably not so bad.

Hopes are high that the drouth has ended. I am going to gradually rebuild my weight until I'm sure of the weather. Looks like I won't get back on full feed before spring. There's nothing like a trim figure to keep your mind off bad times. I may take up jogging next week.